Editorial

Theology of religions, inter-religious dialogue, cohesive societies, harmony and understanding are among the significant concerns of Asian Christianities. It is precisely from this field that some of the stimulating and refreshing Asian perspectives and insights are emerging and contributing to the advancement of religious studies and theology at the global level. We are happy to present the current number of IJAC whose three main articles are centred around the issue of interreligious dialogue with a focus on Asia but with implications for the global study and research in this field.

The first article by Paul Hwang is a highly enlightening piece which tries to bring into conversation Buddhist Zen Master Chinul of Korea with Bernard Lonergan. It is not any mere comparison of their thought or simply drawing of parallels between their contributions, something generally done to promote inter-religious dialogue. The author sees both Chinul and Lonergan meeting beyond thought in a realm that is outside the pale of epistemology and cognitive theories. What corresponds to Chinul's Buddhist enlightenment is not a theory of understanding in Lonergan, but rather conversion or *metanoia*. For, both enlightenment and conversion imply a radical transformation of consciousness. This transformation takes place in every authentic effort of understanding, which is, at the same time, a move in self-transcendence, according to Lonergan. In short, conversion as *metanoia* in the Christian understanding would be the correlate of Buddhist sudden, direct, cutting and intuitive enlightenment (*satori*). With enlightenment (rather than knowledge and understanding) as the focal point, the article takes us to a new level of Buddhist-Christian conversation in Asia and elsewhere in the world.

The second article by John Robinson is an invitation to practice interreligious dialogue from an alternative perspective. It starts posing the fundamental question of the legitimacy of using the philosophy, culture, and categories originating from non-Christian traditions for Christian purposes. Critiquing the traditional approach in this matter since the time of Augustine (*spolia Egypti*), the author states that any such deployment of the culture and philosophy would be justified only if we do not disconnect and isolate them from

the people to whom these belong. The author instantiates his arguments by taking up the traditional Christian soteriology (for example, Anselm) which has remained with an archaic world-view. It is a fact that in Christology, soteriological reflections have not undergone developments like in the question of the union of the divine and the human. Drawing from the Buddhist medieval philosopher Nagarjuna, the author shows how a Christian soteriology could be moulded. This kind of soteriology would make sense today, position the Christian believers in an engaging conversation with interlocutors of other faiths, and make them learn from the other. This kind of approach is far from the approach of instrumentalizing other religions and cultures to convey the truths of one's religion.

Asia is the continent, surely, with the largest number of Muslims in the world. In today's circumstances, it is of utmost importance that Asian Christians encounter Muslims and enter into dialogue with their (Muslims) religious and theological conceptions. The expression 'people of the book' is often invoked to underline the commonality and shared beliefs of Jews, Christians, and Muslims, and the closer historical ties that bind them. However, today, the expression has undergone a particular extrapolation. In the contemporary right-wing environment, religions of the book and founders seem to dominate, as these provide fixed points of reference which are politically advantageous. No wonder, then, that Hinduism, though has no single or commonly accepted sacred book or founder, is reconfigured into a political ideology—as is done by the Hindutva in India. There is an effort at 'semitization' of Hinduism: The Hindus are projected as people of the book (*Bhagavadgita*) like the Jews, Christians, and Muslims, and Hinduism itself is redesigned into a religion of one founder or prophet—Lord Ram. In this context, it would be interesting to go deeper into what is meant by religions of the book and how Muslims, Jews, and Christians understand themselves regarding their sacred books. The third article by Richard Kimball precisely tries to respond to this issue by focusing on what Muslims understand by the expression 'people of the book'. The author explores the meaning of this expression in the spirit of Islamic commentary tradition of *tafsīr*. He tells us how some of the notable Muslim and Christian scholars of contemporary times, respectful of religious plurality, understand the expression 'people of the book'. The article also discusses whether 'people of the Word', rather than 'people of the book' could contribute better to the cause of promoting religious dialogue and harmony among Muslims and Christians in Asia and in other parts of the world.

The Philippines is a country with almost ninety per cent of its citizens adhering to various Christian denominations, and especially to Catholicism. The most talked about issue in the country currently is the war on drugs waged

by president Duterte with a horrendous record of thousands of extrajudicial killings. How come that this president enjoys widespread support for his war on drugs despite his clear anti-Christian and anti-religious statements? This is intriguing and baffling. In this issue, under the section notes from the field, Jayeel Cornelio and Ia Marañon go into one aspect of the question. They report on the results of an empirical study they undertook among the leaders and followers of megachurches in the Philippines regarding their stand on the war on drugs, and examine what is behind their support for a programme which leaders of most other Churches are highly critical of and have condemned. The authors conclude that the apolitical stand vis-à-vis the programme on the war on drugs by these megachurches have to do with the spiritualizing, moralizing, and apocalyptic theology they profess. The pastors of these Churches look at the war on drugs as an opportunity to arrest the moral decline and as a help for evangelistic outreach. The position held and arguments wielded by the megachurches are alarming, taking into account their impact as one of the fastest growing Christian denominations in Asia. Thanks to this essay, we are led to understand how questionable theologies could be harmful, and how they could condition the mindset and the political stand of believers, their leaders, and institutions also in other parts of the world.

Due to space constraint in this issue of IJAC, we could cover only a limited number of essays and book reviews. However, we hope that the high quality of the contributions presented here will offset this. I wish to express my sincere thanks to all the contributors for making available to the readers of our journal the fruit of their painstaking researches, and to all the colleagues of the editorial board and members of the advisory board of IJAC for their support in preparing this volume.

Felix Wilfred

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